Hello and welcome to the Graduate College workshop, Attending a Professional Conference. As a graduate student and as an undergraduate, there will be many opportunities to present your research at professional conferences.
This workshop is intended to give you the basic skills for choosing, preparing for, and attending professional conferences. Some of you may have already attended a conference or conferences and this presentation will help you fine-tune the presentation skills you already possess. At the end of the workshop we will leave you with a list of resources for more information.
Choosing a Conference

- Faculty and department heads should be aware of upcoming conferences
- Search by subject or region
  - For example: Midwest Archives Conference, ASCD Conference on Education Leadership
- Consider your budget when choosing:
  - Registration fees and deadlines, travel time and cost, lodging and dining expenses
  - Does your department/college or the conference offer funding?
- Be aware of due dates

Each year, hundreds of professional conferences are held, making deciding which conference to attend a little tricky. Talking with faculty members in your department is the best way to learn about conferences. Professors may have presented there themselves, know someone in charge at the conference, or be thinking of attending a conference and looking for a student to co-present with them. If the faculty member you consult does not have any ideas, it might be helpful to talk to your department head or do a Google search. If searching online, be specific about the subject or region of the conference you want to attend. For example someone who wants to work with archives or has done a project with archives might attend the Midwest Archives Conference in Kansas City, Missouri in 2014. Regional conferences are perfect for people who can’t afford to travel far. Before you choose a conference it is important to think seriously about a budget. Take into consideration that the conference probably has a registration fee, traveling costs, booking a hotel room if it’s a multiple day event farther away, and the costs of meals. Then look into funding opportunities by talking to your department head. There may be funding available from your program or college. The Graduate College may also have funds available for students attending conferences. The Intercollegiate Academic Fund is another source of funding for graduate students. The resources slide has a link to both the Graduate College’s Graduate Student Opportunity Fund and the Intercollegiate Academic Fund. Due dates are another factor to consider when choosing a conference. Often abstracts need to be submitted months in advance of a conference. If you start looking and the deadline is a week away and you have nothing prepared, that conference probably will not work this year. It is best to look at conference far in advance for proper planning.
Attending conferences to hear presentations and network is a great way to stay involved in your field of study, but presenting at a conference will give you added benefits. Presenting your research as a student shows your commitment to your discipline as well as your education and the hard work you have put toward your degree and future career goals. Presenting at a conference should be listed under a ‘Professional Development’ or ‘Conferences Attended’ heading on your resume and/or CV, and will look great for future employers or graduate colleges. Attending a conference allows you to network, but presenting also allows you to network with attendees of your presentation who heard and saw the type of work you are doing. These networking opportunities may prove to be more in-depth because the professionals or colleagues who attended your presentation may show interest in your work and offer suggestions or constructive criticism that will enhance your research. As a student it is important to know that funding is generally only awarded for those presenting at conferences.
Further Benefits of Attending

• To learn about career, internship, collaboration possibilities.
• To learn about fellowship and grant opportunities
• Use other presenters as models
• Develop professional recognition

It is beneficial to spend time talking to the professionals in your field. Relationships formed at conferences may lead to future career, internship, or collaboration possibilities. University faculty members and representatives from various organizations attend conferences, if you take a chance and do a little networking they may be able to inform you of fellowship, scholarship, or grant opportunities through their university or organization that you would qualify for through your research. This networking is all a part of developing a professional reputation. Along with those benefits, observing other presenters will give you a model of how other professionals dress, compile and present their research, and handle the pressure of presenting. Sometimes, hopefully not often at professional conferences, the presenters may show you what behaviors to avoid. Furthermore, your name and research topic will be listed in the program of the event or on the online schedule. This promotes your name with the conference and anyone searching your name, such as future employers or Ph.D. programs who will recognize that you have professional experience outside of the classroom.
As mentioned before, proposal or abstract deadlines, registration fees, and funding requests are often due months in advance, so be proactive. A good suggestion may be to develop a timeline of tasks to complete before the conference and work backwards from the deadline. While gathering your research and preparing your presentation it is always helpful to have multiple people proofread your work whether it is a written paper, poster presentation, or program proposal. Faculty members and the Academic Learning Center located in the ITTC on campus are two great resources that can help you proofread your material. As soon as your materials have been properly proofed and you are certain they are ready for the conference, send them to the printer. Printing a poster can take anywhere from a few hours to a couple weeks depending on how you are getting it printed. Getting your materials printed early will save you the headache of feeling rushed. Another way to ease the stress of attending a conference is to develop a checklist of essential items. Practicing your presentation will help relieve anxiety about sharing your research and public speaking. Practice in front of the mirror, practice in front of friends and family, ask a professor if you could present in front of your class. The more you know your material, the easier it will be to present at the conference. Remember to pay attention to dress codes that may be listed on the conference website. Tee shirts and jeans are not considered appropriate even during more casual opportunities.
Preparation Continued

• Make networking cards
• Utilize social media
  – Twitter or LinkedIn
  – Encourages mingling at the conference among those that established relationships online.
• Research the keynote speaker and the speakers of interest to you
• Book a hotel room early to stay close to the action
  – Conferences are often held in or near hotels and reserve a number of rooms for attendees

Networking cards help others remember who you are. There are many sites online such as Vistaprint that allow you to view sample cards and customize your own for a fair price. Generally, networking cards include your name, job title, employer or university for students and their address, email address (maybe cell phone number), and possibly a LinkedIn address. Order networking cards at least two weeks in advance to account for printing and delays in shipping. UNIBusiness offers business cards for students with the UNI logo. You should utilize social media and online searches to prepare for networking opportunities at the conference. Many conferences have groups on Facebook, listings on LinkedIn, or Twitter accounts or hashtags that you can follow to stay up-to-date on all the news surrounding the conference. This encourages people to connect online and promotes discussion and networking during the conference. Review the final schedule when it is posted and keep an eye on the website. Pay close attention to the keynote speaker and do some research in order to understand their work. This information could help you initiate conversations with other conference attendees. Decide which sessions you plan to attend before the conference and research the speakers’ interests. This will allow you to participate in the discussion or question and answer sessions of their presentations. Often conferences are held in or near hotels and reserve a number of rooms for attendees. Remember to book your hotel room early and also save a little money. Staying in the same hotel as others means that you might be able to interact with them in less formal ways, like sharing an elevator or walking to the conference center, in which you can establish professional relationships.
Attire

- Business professional
- Better to be over-dressed than under-dressed
- Attire influences how people view you.

At a conference you will be making a lot of first impressions that will influence the way people remember you. Your professional dress conveys to the conference attendees that you take the conference and your work seriously. Looking through conference pictures from the previous year will give you an idea about what attire is appropriate.
Poster Presentations

• Consult a faculty member, poster requirements vary by discipline
• Professional and appealing
• Look up printing locations, costs, and deadlines early
• Make sure poster is sent to print in proper format

Making a poster can be a challenging experience, but it is a great way to exhibit your work to an audience on a one-to-one or small group basis. Poster holders are generally 4 feet x 4 feet in size, most printing options print around 48 inches by 44 inches. Pay attention to the requirements of the specific conference you attend and also what your discipline recommends. Your department may have field specific poster requirements, so it is best to consult a faculty member before you begin designing your poster. If your field of discipline does not require a specific design, there are numerous poster templates you can find online with a simple search and download. Posters tend to be text heavy, but they should act similar to a PowerPoint in that each section is organized and show critical aspects of your research. If an audience member has questions they will be able ask you to explain or elaborate on a specific section. Be ready to explain or elaborate. Posters should look professional and appealing. If it is acceptable in your field, use pictures to grab viewers’ attention and add to the appeal of the poster. Double-check your chosen printer’s required format. While you may create your poster in PowerPoint, a printer may require you to send your files as a JPEG. Be sure to clarify those instructions when you make the printing arrangements. Failure to comply with the requirements may mean a blurry or distorted poster.
Poster Printing Resources on Campus

• The College of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences (CHAS) Prints Posters
  • $25 for students not in a program in the CHAS
    • Payable by cash or check
  • Free for students in a program in CHAS
  • PDF or Power Point format only
• Email poster as attachment to manager@cns.uni.edu or bring a flashdrive to Wright 206
• Questions: call 273-5809 or stop by Wright 206
• CSBS Poster Printing
  • Students in a CSBS program will be able to print their posters for free; they will just need to fill out the request form at least a week in advance.
  • Request Form: http://www.csbs.uni.edu/tech/labs/posters.html
• Consult with your faculty advisor if you are unsure of where to print your poster
Oral presentations are a great way to present your research while working on building your public speaking skills. Instead of the smaller group section of poster presentations, oral presenters are faced with a larger group for a shorter amount of time. Oral presenters can but are usually not required to use visual aids such as a PowerPoint slideshow. Whenever using a PowerPoint, check the website or contact the conference coordinator to be sure your PowerPoint and the computers are compatible. You may also be expected to bring your own equipment in some circumstances. It is also helpful to email yourself an attachment of the PowerPoint or bring two flash drives in case something happens. Oral presentations generally include a question and answer section that allows interaction between the audience and the presenter. While your presentation should seek to cover all necessary information on your project, you should anticipate some questions the audience may have. When answering the audience’s questions, be professional, not defensive.
Because a conference is expensive and time consuming, making the most out of it is very important. Be prepared to present your work and yourself professionally, choose to network, and make connections with people you do not know. Be involved on every level of the conference by attending extra sessions and taking advantage of any special offers the conference promotes such as arranged dining and tour opportunities. At a conference you never know who you are about to meet, so always be at your best and make a good first impression. If you choose to attend a reception where alcohol is available, drink casually and remember any purchases will not be reimbursed by the University! If you receive funding, review what expenses are covered and be sure to keep all of your other receipts to submit on your refund. Upon your return, submit your refund in a timely manner. Visit the room assigned to your presentation and get familiar with the technology before the day of your presentation. Of course, get a full night’s sleep before you present so you will be ready to go the next day.
While Presenting

• Bring necessities, be early
• Anxiety is normal, the audience is there to hear about your work
• Use eye contact and relaxed, open behavior
• Use good posture and breathe steadily
• Keep hands at your side
• If you are using papers/notecards leave them on the podium
• Engage audience by using variety in your voice and avoid a monotone

Before you leave your hotel room, double check that you have everything you need, like your flash drive or laser pointer. Some conferences provide bottled water, if you choose to drink water while presenting be as discrete as possible. You may consider bringing your own water as well. It is common courtesy to be early to all scheduled appointments, but at a conference it is necessary. You want to be organized and focused. Setting up your poster or PowerPoint may take a while. Anxiety when presenting is normal, just remember that the audience is there because they are interested in the work you are doing. To control anxiety, maintain eye contact with the audience and an open and friendly demeanor. Smile. It will make your audience feel at ease and make you more comfortable. Use good posture while presenting: shoulders back and knees bent. Try to breathe steady, try not to fidget by moving your body or your hands. Much of this is learned by practicing. If you are using notecards or papers minimize movements by leaving them on the podium or table and using the “swipe” method by leaving your notes on the podium and swiping completed ones away from your current topic. Swipe the used notecards to the bottom of the pile. Keep the audience entertained and alert by using variety in your voice.
After Presenting

• Answer any follow-up questions your audience might have
• Network by suggesting exchanging contact information with colleagues interested in your work
• Attend other presentations for continued networking and learning opportunities

While you are presenting, you may want a colleague to take notes for you and jot down any questions asked by the audience or key notes you may want to remember after the event. After presenting, some audience members may have questions about your research. Answer them, and if it is appropriate, ask for suggestions or more comments. Take the added attention and turn it into a networking opportunity. Ask for their contact information. Then attend the other sessions of the conference, ask questions of those presenters, and continue networking. Make sure to have business cards on hand to exchange contact information.
After the Conference

• Stay connected
  – Remember to say thank you when receiving business cards and to all whom you meet
• Organize materials received
  – Business cards, handouts
• Send emails to new contacts or presenters whom you enjoyed
• Take feedback from panel or judges into consideration on your project
• Plan for next year’s conference

It is important to stay connected with the people you met at the conference. Organizing handouts, business cards and programs you received shortly after the conference will help you remember the research interests of those you met and their contact information. Remember to follow-up within a week of the conference. Emailing new connections with a simple message like, “it was nice to meet you at the conference,” or “thank you for the suggestions concerning my research,” reminds them of who you are and shows that you want to keep that relationship going. You could also find them on a professional social media site like LinkedIn. This allows them to see your experience, education, and research background in an in-depth yet unobtrusive way. Reflect on your experience at the conference and consider attending again or exploring other conference opportunities. It is never too early to begin planning (and saving up) for great experiences like attending professional conferences.
Resources to Prepare for Presenting

• Forbes Magazine “How to Work a Room Like You Own the Place.”
• Tips for making a positive impression with body language, video “Body Language That Gets The Job.”
• Tips for reducing public speaking anxiety [link](http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/presentations/pdf/dealingwithstagefright.pdf)
Business Cards, Poster Information and Funding Opportunities


• UNI business cards: http://business.uni.edu/web/pages/professional/BusinessCards/businesscards-1.cfm


• Intercollegiate Academic Fund application: http://www.uni.edu/vpaa/iaf/TravelFundGuidelines.shtml

• Graduate College’s Graduate Student Opportunity fund: http://www.grad.uni.edu/now-accepting-applications-graduate-student-opportunity-fund